

VZCZCXRO3351
OO RUEHDBU RUEHFL RUEHKW RUEHLA RUEHNP RUEHROV RUEHSR
DE RUEHSI #0389/01 0571415
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
O 261415Z FEB 09
FM AMEMBASSY TBILISI
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 1068
INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEKJCS/OSD WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RHEHAAA/NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TBILISI 000389

NOFORN
SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/26/2019

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [MOPS](#) [GG](#)

SUBJECT: GEORGIA REAFFIRMS COMMITMENT TO JOINING NATO

REF: A. [HTTP://WWW.MOD.GOV.GE/2007/DOWNLOADS/VISION\(P ERCE-NT SIGN\)20ENGLISH\(UNDERSCORE\)2009.PDF](http://WWW.MOD.GOV.GE/2007/DOWNLOADS/VISION(P%20ERCE-NT%20SIGN)20ENGLISH(UNDERSCORE)2009.PDF)

[B](#). TBILISI 313

[C](#). TBILISI 23

[D](#). TBILISI 169

[E](#). TBILISI 165

Classified By: Ambassador John F. Tefft for Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C/NF) Summary and comment. Georgian officials continue to express through both public and private channels their continued commitment to NATO membership. On February 17, the Minister of Defense released his "Minister's Vision 2009," a public document that identifies NATO membership as one of Georgia's top foreign and security policy priorities. The Defense Minister and the Chief of Defense have privately expressed this same commitment to the DATT; the Foreign Minister reaffirmed Georgia's commitment in a February 25 meeting with the Ambassador; and President Saakashvili did so publicly in his February 12 state of the nation address. Although the President's message did not focus on membership to the same extent his 2008 address did, this change in emphasis reflects the prominence of the economic difficulties currently facing Georgia as well as advice from the Allies not to raise expectations unrealistically. The Government has also made a more general shift from public, political pronouncements about NATO membership to a more practical focus on taking the specific steps required to join the alliance. Government efforts are currently focused on the internal reforms necessary to prepare for membership and the adjustments necessary to move from the Individual Partnership Action Plan (IPAP) to the Annual National Plan (ANP). End summary and comment.

DEFENSE MINISTER'S VISION: NATO MEMBERSHIP IS CENTRAL

[1](#)2. (SBU) On February 17, Defense Minister Sikharulidze publicly unveiled his "Minister's Vision 2009" (ref A), which lays out the Minister's key priorities for improving the Ministry's ability to provide for Georgia's defense and security. The document notes in particular the importance of balancing longer-term strategic interests with more immediate needs arising from the still unstable post-war environment. An entire section of the document is devoted to NATO membership: "One of the main priorities of Georgia's foreign and security policy is integration into NATO." While membership itself is clearly a strategic goal, the steps necessary to qualify for membership appear as prominent shorter-term objectives. The NATO section's specific objectives include several that focus on continuing to work through bilateral and partnership programs to prepare for NATO integration. The document notes the importance of using both ongoing and new formats, such as the Planning and Review Process (PARP), the Annual National Plan (ANP) and the NATO-Georgia Commission, to improve compatibility and interoperability.

OFFICIALS REINFORCE COMMITMENT

¶3. (C) Both Sikharulidze and Chief of Defense Chachibaia have told the DATT in recent conversations the Ministry and the Government remain fully committed to NATO membership. The Ministry of Defense continues to listen carefully to NATO international staff suggestions on developing the ANP, a process with which the government of Georgia is still unfamiliar. U.S.-funded defense advisors indicate that Ministry officials continue to dedicate a lot of effort to understanding what the ANP calls for. During a February 16 NATO Ambassador's briefing, NATO SYG Special Representative Bob Simmons noted that the Georgian first draft of an ANP QBob Simmons noted that the Georgian first draft of an ANP needed more work, mainly to include longer-term goals. According to Simmons, there were no fatal flaws in this first draft and he found continued Georgian commitment to produce a good document. While guilty of not understanding how the ANP differs from the IPAP, there is no less staff effort to make the kind of process reforms required than there has been in the past. Both the Minister and the Chief of Defense agree that NATO membership is the only realistic strategic security provider. Both are eager to contribute forces to work in ISAF as a way of proving to the Allies that Georgia would be a useful member of the Alliance.

¶4. (C) Foreign Minister Vashadze likewise reaffirmed to the Ambassador on February 25 Georgia's continued commitment to NATO membership, and pledged that the Government would do its best to draft a good ANP.

¶5. (SBU) On February 12, in his state of the nation address, President Saakashvili reaffirmed Georgia's goal of integrating into NATO in order to ensure Georgia's security.

TBILISI 00000389 002.2 OF 002

He spent little time discussing NATO membership, however, devoting most of his attention to meeting Georgia's economic challenges. This represented a marked contrast to his 2008 address, in which he made NATO membership the centerpiece of his remarks (ref B). This shift in emphasis is not surprising, considering that Georgia faces serious economic difficulties, and that polls consistently show economic issues to be among the chief concerns of the population (ref C). Government interlocutors, including the president, have made clear they intend to focus first on those concerns (ref D).

FOCUS ON CONCRETE PROGRESS

¶6. (SBU) In addition, the lower-key public approach on NATO reflects a more practical focus by the Government on the concrete work required to prepare for membership. For example, at the parliamentary address (ref B), Saakashvili spoke of increasing transparency in government, strengthening the judiciary and reforming the national security structure. In another move reflective of Alliance advice, Saakashvili engaged members of the opposition and took questions from them following his speech. He has visibly increased his and his parties' efforts to engage in a dialogue on a range of domestic reforms, including: improving the media climate, bringing the Criminal Procedure Code in line with western standards, and adopting a new election code (ref E). In short, the Georgian Government appears to be taking the kind of holistic approach to NATO membership that the U.S. and other Allies have long advocated.

TEFFT